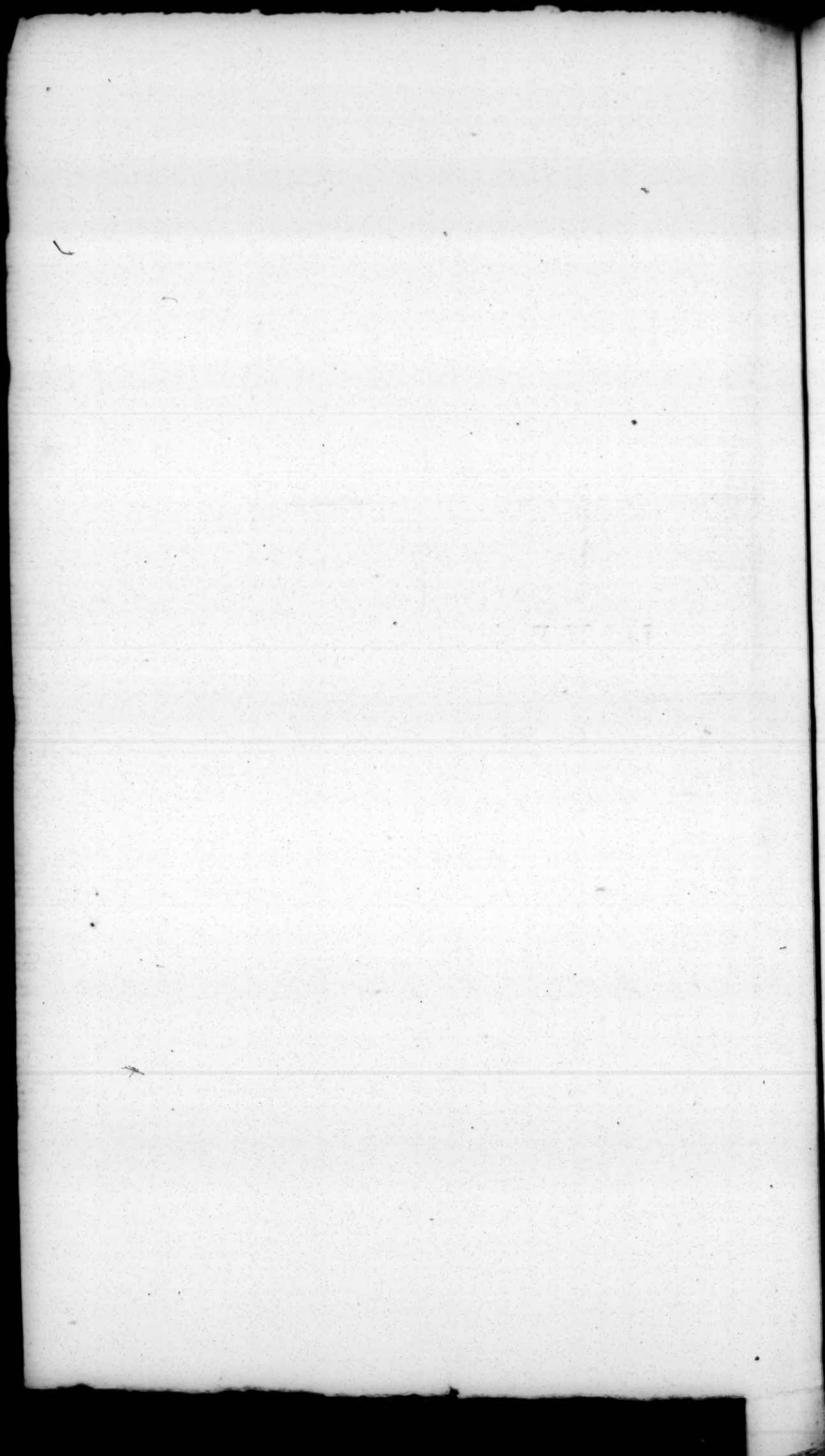


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AN ADDRESS
TO THE
DISSENTERS.

PRICE FOURPENCE.



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AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
DISSENTERS,
ON
THE STATE
of their
POLITICAL AND CIVIL LIBERTY,
AS
SUBJECTS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN.

BY
SAMUEL CATLOW,
OF
MANSFIELD.

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1788.





AN
ADDRESS
to the
DISSENTERS.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

HAPPY in possessing the liberty of addressing my countrymen on any subject which has general utility for its object, and anxious for the establishment of the common rights of men, which are infringed by some existing laws of Great Britain, I have presumed

to call your attention to those which concern you as Dissenters from that mode of religious worship which is established by the State. The office might have fallen into abler hands, and the discharge of it might have been more respectfully received from characters of established reputation, but what they are pleased to neglect, a sense of duty commands, and a confidence in the goodness of the Cause, encourages me to attempt.

The rejection in the last session of Parliament, of your petition, in which you asserted your rights as British Subjects, should excite an animation in your cause proportioned to the zeal with which it has been opposed, and that unremitted perseverance which so fair and honest a cause will always justify. As members of a civil community you have, or ought to have, an equal voice in that community, and when its laws are founded upon equality, and have common good for their end, it is your duty to give them all possible support; to respect the men who execute them with integrity, and to demean yourselves
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in every view, as well-contented Citizens; but no species of sophistry should possess the power to persuade you, that an inattention to your present political situation is of a laudable nature, or, that it is a matter of small importance whether the disgraceful and oppressive laws which cut you off, in a great measure, from your country, be repealed or not; you may be amused with the idea that a spirit of toleration pervades the present legislative body, and that those laws, whose language is degradation and oppression, are and ever will be, a mere *brutum fulmen*; but low in the scale of civil dignity is that body of men who rely upon the temper of the times for their respectability and safety, and not upon the laws of their country, and who exert not their united and constitutional efforts to procure the repeal of those laws which are partial and unjust.

The Test-Act places you in the situation of aggrieved subjects. In the reign of the second Charles, in which it was made, it was stiled, "An Act for preventing the dangers which may happen from

Popish Recusants"---and required that all persons enjoying any office or place of trust and profit should take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy in public and open court, and should also receive the sacrament in some parish church, immediately after divine service. The Protestant Nonconformists of the times coincided with the views of Government, as a bill in their favor, and to exempt them from the operation of the said act, was then preparing, which, they were led to believe, would be passed during the same session of Parliament; but the King, sensible that the Papists, to whom he was attached, were excluded from the benefit of this act, shewed no farther concern for the interest of the Presbyterians, but adjourned the Parliament before the Lords had given their consent to the bill.

Thus was an act passed, the sole object of which was, to exclude Papists from a share in the Government of this kingdom, which, to the disgrace of modern times, is not yet repealed. You are the present objects of it, and, except the utmost of that
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power which the constitution of your country warrants, is called into vigorous exercise, it will be entailed upon your posterity. In your degraded situation none of you can say to your Sons---‘ Cultivate
‘ the talents which the benignity of heaven hath
‘ imparted to you, and aspire to fill the offices of
‘ public trust and consequence ; the liberal Genius
‘ of your country requires not your compliance with
‘ religious ceremonies as the test of a patriot or loyal spirit ; it claims not your countenance to rites,
‘ which you deem repugnant to the rational temper
‘ of the Christian System, prior to your entrance
‘ into situations of the highest civil importance ; it
‘ requires only the suffrage of your countrymen and
‘ your active zeal in your country’s cause ; it regards not your faith respecting matters in religion,
‘ but abhors to discriminate between its warmest
‘ friends, whether they be members of the church
‘ as by law established, or, upon principles of conscience, adhere to that mode of worshipping God,
‘ which, in their estimation, is more conformed to
‘ the truth of God, and more friendly to the interests

‘ of a pure and moral religion.’---- It is painful to say, that the Code of British laws, though, in general, fraught with the purest principles of liberty, sanctifies the infliction of penalties for the maintenance of tenets which are, in no shape, connected with civil actions, and pronounces the sentence of civil incapacity on those, who, from conscientious motives, refuse their compliance with an offensive mode of engaging in one of the solemn ordinances of religion.

Those among you who are respectable on account of opulence, abilities, and patriotic spirit, are excluded from situations in which they might prove essentially serviceable to their country, and gratify that laudable ambition which every Citizen has a right to entertain ; and upon what ground ? Is it because their opponents can convict them of indulging seditious principles ? No, Great Britain cannot boast of more peaceable subjects. Is it because they are disaffected to the interest of the present reigning Family ? No, his Majesty has not more warm or zealous friends. Is it because they are unfriendly to
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the Established Church? They are no otherwise unfriendly to it than that it is not the Church which they approve, which they can conform to in consistency with the obedience which they owe to the Author of their faith. They pray not for her prosperity, but they disturb not her repose, nor by one unfair or unhandsome proceeding would further that reformation, which, as friends to the truth and simplicity of the gospel, they hope will some time be effected. Whatever, in the mad paroxysms of fanatic zeal, may have been the reproach of either party, they have no other wish than to use the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, with modesty, with temper, and with charity. They disown all levelling spirit; they covet no spoil; they envy not the Church her honors and her riches, and though they are persuaded that these honors and riches have been no way favorable to the interests of Christ's kingdom, they wield no other weapons in the cause of truth and a better religion than what reason and revelation furnish; they respect conscience in a member of the Church as much

as in themselves, and venerate the man, by whatever name distinguished, who, uninfluenced by the little peculiarities of his party, is principally concerned for the interests of piety and virtue, those interests for which Christ both lived and died. As Men, as Britons, and as Christians, they have a right to judge on every subject which is presented to their minds; they may speculate in religion, in politics, in every science with the same freedom, and with minds as enlightened, as any of their established brethren; but to think, to judge, to speculate is no crime; to differ, with peace and candor, from a fellow-citizen argues no unfitness, no disqualification for one civil office. To think alike on any one topic belongs not to men, and least of all to Englishmen; nor is it desirable, as it is not the character of an enlightened, but of a stupid and barbarous age. He who concludes a factious spirit, hostile to civil government from a peaceable use of religious liberty, would be equally justified in fastening the same reproach on the man, who, by means of different associations, may hold different sentiments

ments concerning any branch of historical, mathematical or philosophical knowledge. I see no discriminating mark, in a civil view, between the man, who believes in the proper humanity of Christ and the man, who believes that Christ sustains the character of the second person in the Trinity; the chance of probable worth on each side is equal; the former may be a better man, a more sincere admirer, a more zealous supporter of the form of British government, and a more animated friend of the house of Hanover than the latter, and *vice versa*; and it will require infinite ingenuity to prove, that the man who formally kneels at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and who receives the bread and wine according to the rites of the established church, will make a better Statesman, or speak in Parliament the sentiments of his Constituents with a firmer tone, or serve his country with greater integrity and courage, than the man, who thinks that mode to be unauthorized by the founder of the ordinance, and that it countenances a faith, which is not the faith of the gospel.

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What then is the latent cause of prolonging the existence of the Test Act, and what means should be adopted to effect its repeal? Your enemies cannot aver, that it was originally framed for you; and yet it holds forth its terrific aspect to you and your Sons! If you possessed every seditious and turbulent quality, which its hot-headed advocates pretend to be inherent in you; if it could be fairly proved, that to be turbulent and seditious constituted part of your religious Creed, your Governors would be justified in enacting laws against you severer than those which at present exist; but they have not this plea; ---the first Minister of the state, in his speech on the subject of Mr. Beaufoy's motion, asserted, "That the Dissenters constituted a very respectable body of people, and that he would exert all his influence to support their just privileges if they were about to be violated."--- The inconsistency between this assertion and the conduct which accompanied it, is too evident to need any comment, and it hurt the warmest friends of the house of the immortal Chatham to find, that one of the most prominent features

tures of that integrity, which they fondly ascribed to the present popular branch of it, was, on that day obliterated; and where is the body of men who will put confidence in the Minister, who, in the moment of promising future friendly exertions, was acting in opposition to their best interests?

Leaving Statesmen, then, to reconcile their views with the dictates of conscience, it is of importance to you to consider, what are the constitutional means of effecting the repeal of those laws which oppress you. Your civil and religious liberties are infringed, notwithstanding the boasted toleration of these Realms, and if you will attend to the voice of Nature, when she is circumscribed in her rights, you will find it forcible and animated.---- It expresses, in the clearest accents, the ignominy of those who timidly submit to slavery without an effort to emancipate themselves, and the exalted dignity of those who sedulously watch the gloomy steps of tyranny and oppression, and with zeal oppose their progress. I would exhort you, then, my Countrymen, to rouse
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your native spirit ; to assert the rights of men and of Britons, and to exhibit in the face of the world, that it is your determined resolution to attempt, by every legal means, the recovery of your ancient privileges and to place yourselves in a respectable situation among your fellow-citizens. Notwithstanding your late application to the House of Commons for a removal of your grievances, and notwithstanding the zeal which has marked the conduct of some, the friends of your Cause have too great reason to fear, that inattention to your interests hath pervaded your general body, and that the spirit of liberty doth still, in a great measure, slumber among you. But let not an imaginary security lull you into confidence, or the pretended tolerating principles of your Governors lead you to depart from that line of active measures which should ever mark your Characters. Remember, if there is not total ruin included in your continued inactivity, there is a degrading want of independence and public spirit ; while it continues, you are deficient in your duty to yourselves, to your posterity, to the noble cause which distinguishes

guishes you as Dissenters from the English Church, and to the general interests of civil and religious Liberty. You have no reason to despond on the ground of the unsuccessful tendency of your exertions, for you are not so inconsiderable a body of men, that your collected energy, when employed in asserting the dignity and the rights of Men, would produce no beneficial effect either to yourselves, or to those in whose behalf Nature demands your most animated efforts. You have failed in securing the object of your past exertions; not for want of zeal and just conceptions in a few individuals, not for want of a cordial wish in the general body of Dissenters to procure the possession of their natural privileges, but for want of a general expression of that wish; for it has not yet been rendered evident that the Dissenters unite as a Man, to procure the repeal of those laws which affect their civil and religious Liberty; but rather that they are generally satisfied with the apparently mild and tolerating Spirit of the times, and leave the assertion of their natural privileges to a few of their animated Lead-

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ers, perfectly careless respecting the event of their exertions. While this is the case; while Dissenters forget the principal feature in the character of their ancestors, a noble zeal in the cause of general Liberty, affairs cannot but remain as they are; nay, the forbearing disposition which they exhibit may present to some of the ambitious friends of the Hierarchy, anxious for its encreasing splendor, a probable ground for the farther deprivation of their privileges.

Had I the pen of Junius it should be employed to rouse your decayed Spirit; to animate you in the cause of Liberty, and to influence you to adopt those active measures which will secure the possession of it to yourselves, and which will enable you to transmit it to your Sons; it should spread the effusions of its patriotic Spirit to the most distant part of Albion's domain, and warm the breast of each generous Briton; even the Sons of the Establishment should enter, with ardor, into the merits of our Cause, and, as the friends of Liberty, give their voice in its support; forgetting their long indulged
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prejudices they should clasp us to their bosoms as the Friends of Mankind, and as the Assertors of Nature's equal Rights. Let us then, my Countrymen, join in hand and heart to secure the common rights of English subjects, and to annihilate the invidious distinction which subsists between us and our neighbors; if success does not crown our exertions, yet the glory of having done our duty, of not having meanly shrunk from the walk of Men, of Britons, and of Christians, will be our consolation.

The measures adopted during the late contest with America have not only marked the characters of those Statesmen with infamy who brought them forward, and displayed their Abettors as the foes of human freedom, but impress the heart, which is friendly to the natural privileges of mankind, with that strong sense of horror, which arises from a reflection on the degraded Spirit of Great Britain, which was exhibited in the face of the World. For the ransom of Kings I would not participate in

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those feelings which must actuate the breasts of such men when reflecting on their prostituted power; on their inattention to the voice of their Constituents; to the voice of Reason and Humanity; but the blood of Myriads shall be required at their hands, and they shall receive a reward proportioned to their deeds! It cannot be a just cause of amazement, that men of this stamp should exert every degree of power to obstruct the progress of liberty in this Isle, or that they should resolutely oppose every measure for a reform either in Church or State, it being their pride, perhaps, that inconsistency shall have no place in the catalogue of their crimes. But we have no reason to despair of success though they continue uniform in their opposition to the Cause of Liberty; a steady perseverance in the paths which the Genius of Freedom points out unto us, and a cordial adherence to those plans which, as subjects of Great Britain, the constitution of our Country exhorts us to contemplate, will, in the end secure the noble object of our wishes; will
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give us cause to rejoice in our animated exertions,
and enable us to transmit the blessing of equal
Rights and equal Liberty to our Sons.



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